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ABSTRACT

Charter schools are defined by North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) as "a public school operated by a group of parents, teachers, and/or community members as a semi-autonomous school of choice within a school district, operating under a 'charter' with the State Board of Education." Since most charter schools do not have the space, funds, or experienced staff to start a library, the logical choice for charter schools to make is to form a partnership with the public library. This study was conducted with charter schools in four counties, in which surveys were sent to four public libraries (50% return) and 10 charter schools (70% return). Five schools reported offering an information skills curriculum and six reported that they possess a collection of books apart from what students use in the classroom. Six schools reported that their students use a public library; two schools have a formal agreement with the library. Four schools reported that their students use the public library during school hours. Only two schools reported that the library had developed programming for them. Schools had varying reasons for difficulties in using academic library resources. Both public libraries reported that a charter school had contacted them about library services available to students; collection development plans were not affected by the schools. Several possible solutions for charter school/library relationships are suggested. (AEF)

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ED 419 542

INFORMATION SERVICES IN TRIANGLE AREA CHARTER SCHOOLS

by
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

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Information Services in Triangle Area Charter Schools

Ten new charter schools opened in the Research Triangle area in the fall of 1997. There were 35 charter schools operating in the state during the 1997-98 school year. North Carolina has received 44 charter school applications for the 1998-99 school year. Charter schools are defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) as "a public school operated by a group of parents, teachers, and/or community members as a semi-autonomous school of choice within a school district, operating under a 'charter' with the State Board of Education."[1] Charter schools are exempt from many of the requirements of a public school. For instance, they do not have to follow the state mandated curriculum. They also do not have to provide a school library media center. The DPI charter schools background webpage specifically states that charter schools "are held responsible for results instead of 'inputs,' such as the number of books in the school's library or the amount of time students spend in class."[2] In fact, most charter schools do not have the space, funds, or experienced staff to start a library. Charter schools have been given the freedom to experiment.

Under these circumstances, how are charter schools providing access for students to books and reference materials? How are they providing for staff development? How are they providing educational materials to support the

curriculum? All of these functions are traditionally performed by the school library media center.

Of course, charter schools may choose to dispense with one or more of the above services. If they do, however, and if the schools still succeed and produce well-educated students, then this will raise questions about the place of the school library media center in traditional as well as non-traditional education.

What first drew my attention to charter schools was an article in the *Independent*, a local free weekly newspaper. Bob Geary wrote about the new charter schools opening up in the area. The sentence that caught my eye read in part, "These schools will be stripped down to the basics: no stages, stadiums, coaches or librarians..."[3] I immediately wondered how the administrators of charter schools were going to provide books for their students. The question is of interest to both children's librarians and educators.

More and more parents and students are turning to charter schools and homeschooling. There is charter school legislation in more than 20 states[4], and it seems likely that if they prove successful, more states will pass laws enabling charter schools to operate.

The logical choice for charter schools to make, at least from the standpoint of someone familiar with libraries, is to form a partnership with the public library. Homeschoolers already rely on the public library for educational support. Several hundred more children using the public library as a primary educational resource will have a significant impact, and will impel changes in the services offered by the public library. If more and more parents and children

choose non-traditional education, the changes will affect the roles of both the public library and the school library in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, there is almost no information about finding a substitute for the school library media center available to people who are developing charter schools. The literature on charter schools is varied and diverse. Much of it focuses on the debate about the necessity for charter schools or elaborates on the philosophy behind the schools. The writers of these articles do not mention libraries. Even articles specifically about setting up the schools or forming partnerships with local agencies do not discuss alternatives to the media center.

For example, Sarah Kass, co-sponsor of Boston's City on a Hill charter school, talks about finding space in a YMCA building close to several museums, a theater, a conservatory, and the ballet. The site she chose is on a trolley line, and she specifically mentions how that was able to save the school $22,100 from the transportation budget[5], but she never once makes any reference to a library or substitute. Of course, she also does not list research skills as part of the requirements for graduation.[6]

Mary Ellen Sweeney describes partnerships that the Community Involved Charter School formed with "a recreation district, a health clinic, senior citizens, businesses, job corps, and social service agencies."[7] She also says, "We intend to make use of already existing services as much as possible,"[8] which could mean the public library. However, she never explicitly states that, and it would have fit so nicely into her list.

There is much to admire about these charter schools for branching out and contacting so many different agencies in the community. Neighborhood partnerships are one of the special and unique aspects of charter schools. On the other hand, perhaps students are missing out on the opportunities that could be provided by a partnership with the public library.

One article, "Catering to Students: A Public Library Serves Alternative Schools," describes the partnership between the Douglas County (Colorado) Library District and two charter schools, as well as homeschoolers. The library introduced several innovations to better serve these special groups, including library cards for teachers with expanded borrower's privileges, acquisitions and interlibrary loan to support curriculum, and an Internet gopher designed to retrieve resources about local history and resources for homeschoolers. This article appeared in *School Library Journal*. It was a case, unfortunately, of a librarian telling other librarians what libraries could do for non-traditional education.

The general gap in the literature concerning libraries is probably due to the fact that educators are not aware of what libraries can do for non-traditional education. In education classes I have taken here at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, students are not taught about what the library can do for them in a school environment. I have talked with women who have teaching certificates and are now studying to be librarians, and they have agreed that their education did not include library instruction. If teachers-in-training don't already have a good idea of the capabilities and possibilities of the library, they will not

receive one in school. While library science students concentrating on school librarianship are urged and encouraged to become partners with classroom teachers, teachers receive no such instruction about us. For this reason, I did not think that finding a substitute for the media center and school librarian would be covered in the charter school literature. And it was not.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction published the Survival Guide for Charter Schools: FY 1997-98. In the introduction it says, "This booklet contains information which is designed to familiarize personnel at Charter Schools with the financial services offered by the Division of School Business and the reporting requirements of the Division."[9] The book specifies hardware and software required for testing students and communicating with DPI. The only other requirement listed was the percentage of teachers that must be certified: 75% for grades K-5 and 50% for grades 6-12. All of the reference readings in the appendix were fiscally oriented, and the contact numbers for DPI personnel covered subjects like school closings, reporting, ratios, and allotments. The whole point of charter schools is to be allowed to experiment, so it is not surprising there were not many requirements. The puzzling thing was that they didn't use one page, even one paragraph, to mention that DPI maintains a collection of educational materials that are available for the public to review, and that they also maintain a library of professional journals and books. Either of these resources could be invaluable to a charter school, but only if the teachers know they are available.

The lack of information about options available to charter schools means that each school has to invent its own method when it comes to a finding a way to provide access to books for their students. There is nothing in the literature that says School A tried this, and it worked pretty well, but these problems occurred and could have been avoided with better planning; School B tried this, and it didn't work at all; and School C tried this, and it was great. There are hundreds of lesson plans and educational theories and research for educators to use when designing instruction. Why should they be forced to start from square one to provide books to students?

By reporting on the decisions made by charter schools in one area, other schools can evaluate their options for providing access to books and resources in other areas and get ideas. I was interested in finding out what the different schools had tried, and which approaches have worked best. This is the information that will be most helpful, especially to people opening charter schools.

This survey was conducted in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina. The charter schools surveyed were in Wake County, Orange County, Durham County, and Chapel Hill. Within that area there are four public library systems: the Wake County Public Library System, the Durham County Library System, the Orange County Public Library, and the Chapel Hill Public Library. Wake has 13 branches. Durham has six branches. Orange has one branch.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction provides many services:

- Evaluation of PreK-12 education materials for all curriculum areas. These books and resources are available at the DPI building in Raleigh for people to examine.
- Publication of *Infotech: The Advisory Lists*, which includes reviews of materials, bibliographies, special purchase offers and grant information. This publication is free to all North Carolina schools.
- Operation of a microcomputer lab so teachers, administrators and librarians can preview software programs.
- Consultation regarding school media programs.
- References services through the Education Information Center for teachers and administrators that includes access to ERIC, the Internet, the Computer Select database, and research journals.

The hours of the Information Technology Evaluation Services (which includes the Education Information Center) are 7:30 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday. The PreK-12 resources could be used to preview books and software so that charter schools can spend their limited funds on the best materials. The professional resources could be used for staff development.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has education and library science programs. North Carolina State University has an education program. Both universities possess a wealth of journals and books on topics related to education, and UNC-CH has an extensive collection of material related to libraries. These books and journals could provide for lesson plans, research,

and staff development. Since both are public institutions, their resources are open to the public.

The State Library has resources related to North Carolina history, useful for special projects relating to North Carolina.

I limited my questions to asking about these institutions because I believed that they could help provide alternatives to the functions normally performed by the media center, as discussed earlier in this paper. Obviously, the resources at UNC-CH and NC State would be geared more towards staff development than providing curriculum support for students.

I sent surveys to four public libraries and ten charter schools. I received two responses from the public libraries (a fifty percent return rate). I received seven responses from the charter schools (a seventy percent return rate). The charter school survey is in Appendix A, and the public library survey is in Appendix B. The results from the charter school survey are in table form in Appendix C, and the results from the public library survey are in table form in Appendix D.

I was interested in several issues, which I tried to get at through the survey. Are charter schools using the public library? If so, are the public librarians developing programs for the charter schools? Do the charter schools have their own collections of books? How were they purchased and how are the administered?

The smallest charter school reported having only one student. This is most likely an error. The largest school reported having 150 students. The

average enrollment is at the seven schools is 77 students. Excluding the school with one student, since that may be an error, the average enrollment is 90 students. Three of the charter schools have more than 100 students. The charter schools would have to purchase a large number of books to provide for so many students.

Five schools reported offering an information skills curriculum. In the question, I defined that as, for an example, formal instruction in how to use reference sources or online databases. Two schools said they did not. I then asked if the information skills were integrated into the curriculum or if they were a separate part. I did not design the question very well since I only asked for a yes or no answer, and as it is stated I am asking two questions. I am only using the data from schools which specified their answer as integrated or separate. Five schools said the curriculum is integrated. That is both excellent and surprising, since the information skills curriculum is not often integrated in public schools.

Six schools reported that they possess a collection of books available to the students apart from what they use in the classroom. Four schools said the purpose of the collection is curriculum support. Two schools said the purpose of the collection is recreational. I should have asked how many books are in each collection.

I did ask how the books were acquired. Four schools said parents purchased books. One school said parents and teachers purchased books and school funds were also used. Another school said teachers and parents purchased books and that school and other funds were also used. Looked at in

a slightly different way, parents bought books for five of the schools. Parents are already buying books at the public library through their taxes. Four schools reported that there is an individual with responsibility for the collection. The titles of these individuals are library coordinator, principal, teachers, and parent.

The next question asked about public library use. Six schools reported that their students use a public library. In the case of the one school whose students do not use the public library, the students are incarcerated. Two schools have a formal agreement with the public library. The libraries that these schools report using are the Hillsborough branch in Orange County, and the Durham Public Library.

I asked about the distance between the libraries and the schools because I thought that this could be an issue. If the library is too far away, it would be inconvenient for students to use. In the case of the two charter schools with agreements, the libraries are one and a half miles and three-fourths of a mile away from the schools. The other schools reported that the library is across the street, six miles away, four miles away, and three miles and one mile away. The last school I listed is apparently between two branch libraries.

Four schools reported that their students use the public library during school hours. Two of those schools are the schools that have agreements with the library. Two schools reported that their students go to the library biweekly. Two said monthly. One school, whose students do not go during school hours, reported that the students do go to the library, and listed the frequency of use as "other," since the educator had no idea how often they go. One other school

answered no—except for special visits, and said that students go to the library twice a year.

Despite the fact that six schools said their students use the library, and four allow their students to use it during school hours, only two schools reported that the public library had developed programming for them. The programs the library developed for one library were booktalks, bibliographic instruction, and reader's advisory. The programs developed for the other school were booktalks and bibliographic instruction.

Booktalks are brief introductions to a book, in the nature of a movie trailer, to get people interested in reading the book. Bibliographic instruction involves teaching patrons how to use the online catalog, how to use reference resources, how to find books in the library—basically, Library Skills 101. Reader's advisory involves suggesting books on certain topics, for instance, "I want to learn about tigers" or "I've read everything by Brian Jacques, what should I read now?" The other items listed were visits to the school, which are probably unlikely given the constraints of time and personnel that the public library has to deal with, and curriculum support, which is a catch-all term for suggesting books, providing materials or lesson plans, etc.

The next four questions focused on use of the resources at the Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, and the State Library.

Four schools reported that the administrator or the teachers used the professional resources (i.e. ERIC, Internet access, research journals) at the

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in the past year occasionally. Three schools said they had not used them at all. The PreK-12 education materials (i.e. books, software, textbooks) at DPI received more use. One school reported frequent use, four reported occasional use, and two schools reported no use.

Three schools reported occasional use of the professional journals or other library resources at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill or North Carolina State University. Four schools reported no use. The state library received approximately the same use. Three schools used its resources occasionally and four not at all.

The last question for the charter schools was a telling one. I asked about difficulties involved in using any of these resources and five schools responded. The reasons they gave were: Some teachers did not have Internet access from home (DPI has an extensive website, which I forgot to specifically mention); Lack of time; Not aware that the resources were available (this one was listed by two schools); The materials at DPI are not available for check-out; The school already subscribes to professional journals; The various resources are hard to get to.

I anticipated many of these problems. The operating hours for DPI do not include weekend or evening hours, and so preclude the vast majority of teachers from effectively using them, except on teacher work days. I know first hand that finding parking on the UNC-CH campus is quite difficult, and I'm sure a similar situation exists at NC State. Also, these resources are not advertised. 'I never

would have known about DPI had I not taken a course from Gerry Solomon, who works there.

I also wanted to approach this question from the public library side of things. Are public librarians seizing this opportunity and approaching the charter schools? What are the available resources? Would several hundred extra juvenile patrons empty the shelves? Do any of the staff members have a background in education? The answers to these questions could affect whether or how charter schools use the public library.

Both public libraries reported that a charter school had contacted them about library services available to students. They had not contacted the charter schools, although one library specified that the charter school made first contact.

Both public libraries reported that a charter school had asked them to develop programming for students. They had not offered to develop programming. It could be that the charter schools requested programming in the first contact. I did not ask about that. Also, I did not ask about the programs that were developed from the library's point of view. Were they entirely new or were they based on existing programs?

One library reported having approximately 21,000-22,000 volumes in juvenile fiction and 10,000-11,000 volumes in juvenile nonfiction. The other library reported having 15,000 volumes in juvenile fiction and 15,000 volumes in juvenile nonfiction. Both libraries said that the presence of the charter school in their communities had not affected their collection development plans in juvenile fiction and nonfiction.

Both libraries reported that the circulation of the juvenile collection increased since August 1997. Also, both libraries had observed an increase in the number of school age children using the library since the charter school in the community opened. One library went on to comment that the main library was closed for remodeling from September to December of 1997 and that could account for the increase noted in questions eight and nine.

Both libraries reported that some of the children and young adult librarians have a background in education.

There are some interesting patterns in these responses. Most of the schools report using the public library, but only two have made any kind of formal agreement with the public library. Of these two schools, only one had asked the library to develop programming. That school visits the public library on a monthly basis. The other school that requested programming has no formal agreement, and the student only goes to the library twice a year. It would be interesting to find out why the other schools did not ask for programming, and why the two schools did. What is the difference?

Oddly enough, both schools with formal agreements with public libraries report that they do not have an information skills curriculum, although one school did answer "integrated" in response to question three. These two schools use the public library frequently during school hours. Students go to the library monthly in the case of one school, and biweekly in the case of the other. Are these schools relying on the public library to provide their information skills curriculum the way public schools rely on the school library media center?

Obviously, charter schools are using the public library, although perhaps not in the most effective manner. Public libraries have the material resources to support non-traditional education, although they are struggling with funding and staffing issues, especially if they want to offer extra programs. Working with charter schools, however, could be a boon in many ways. Parents of children in charter schools take an active interest in their children's education; they could be willing to advocate library funding if it will be used for educational programming.

It is a solution which makes sense in many ways. A new school opening up is allocated extra funds to provide for facilities like the classrooms and the media center. Charter schools do not get these advantages. They cannot even use state funds to purchase a building. The public library, however, is an existing institution. It is already available and full of books.

Some existing library programs could be altered slightly to assist charter schools. Chapel Hill Public Library and the Durham Public Library, to name just two, have bookmobile programs. Stops at charter schools could be added to the bookmobile routes.

Public libraries could seek grant money to develop educational programming to support charter schools. Bibliographic instruction is the most important kind of program for charter schools to request and for public libraries to provide because it is hard to teach information skills in a classroom. To fully master these skills, students need to be exposed to a library environment. Library and information skills will be important and vital for students when they reach college.

Charter schools are not going to go away. Parents and teachers are willing to experiment and take risks to provide the best education possible for their children and students. Public librarians can become a third partner in this grand experiment and ensure that students in charter schools have access to books and non-print resources, and the knowledge to find and use them.

Non-traditional education presents a challenge for both teachers and public library staff. They have a unique opportunity to collaborate and to transform two institutions: the public school and the public library. Together they can help students become lifelong learners and lifelong library users.

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Geary, Bob. *Independent*. p.11
[4] Finn, Chester E., Jr., et al. "Finding the Right Fit: America's Charter Schools Get Started." *Brookings Review* v14, n3 Summer 1996 p.18
[5] Kass, Sarah. "Boston's City on a Hill." *Public Interest* n125 Fall 1996 p.32
[6] Ibid. p.31
[7] Sweeney, Mary Ellen. "How to Plan a Charter School." *Educational Leadership* v52, n1 September 1995 p.47
[8] Ibid. p.47
[9] North Carolina, Division of School Business. Survival Guide for Charter Schools: FY 1997-98. Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, Dept. of Public Instruction, 1997.

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1. How many students were enrolled in your school as of October 1997?

2. Do you offer an information skills curriculum? For example, do your students have formal instruction in how to use reference sources or online databases?

YES NO

3. Is the information skills curriculum a separate part of the curriculum or is it integrated into a subject, such as language arts or social studies?

YES NO

4. Is there a collection of books available to the students apart from what they use in the classroom? YES NO

If YES,

4a. Is the main purpose of this collection curriculum support or recreational? (circle one)

Curriculum support Recreational

4b. Were these books: (circle all that apply)

purchased with school funds?
purchased with other funds?
purchased by teachers?
donated by parents or other individuals?

4c. Is there an individual who has responsibility for the collection?

YES NO

If YES, please provide the title of that individual:

5. Do your students use a public library?

YES NO

If YES,

5a. Is there a formal agreement with the public library?

YES NO

If YES, please provide the name of the library:

5b. How close is the library to the school?

5c. Do students use the public library during school hours?

YES NO

If YES, how often do they go, on the average?
weekly twice a week monthly other (please specify)

6. Has the public library developed any programs for your school?
YES NO

If YES, please circle all that apply:

booktalks bibliographic instruction visits to the school

curriculum support reader's advisory other (please describe)

7. Have you or your teachers used the professional resources (i.e. ERIC, Internet access, research journals) at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in the past year?

Not at all Occasionally Frequently

8. Have you or your teachers used the PreK-12 education materials (i.e. books, software, textbooks) at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in the past year?

Not at all Occasionally Frequently

9. Have you or your teachers used the professional journals or other library resources at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill or North Carolina State University in the past year?

Not at all Occasionally Frequently

10. Have you or your teachers used the resources at the state library in the past year?

Not at all Occasionally Frequently

11. Are there difficulties involved in using any of these resources?
YES NO

If YES, is it because:
a) we were unaware that we could use these resources
b) the resources are hard to get to
c) the staff was not helpful
d) the operating hours are inconvenient
e) other (please specify)

1. Has a charter school contacted you about library services available to students?
YES NO

2. Have you contacted a charter school about library services available to students?
YES NO

3. Has the charter school asked you to develop programming for students?
YES NO

4. Have you offered to develop programming for students?
YES NO

5. Number of volumes in juvenile fiction _____

6. Number of volumes in juvenile nonfiction _____

7. Has the presence of the charter school in your community affected your collection development plans in juvenile fiction and nonfiction?
YES NO

8. Has the circulation of your juvenile collection increased since August 1997?
YES NO

9. Have you observed an increase in the number of school age children using the library since the charter school in your community opened?
YES NO

10. Do any of your children and young adult librarians have a background in education?
YES NO

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5
Number of students enrolled	150	84	25	53	125
Is there an IS curriculum?	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Integrated or separate?	integrated	n/a	integrated	integrated	integrated
Are books available?	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
What is the books' purpose?	recreation	curriculum	recreation	n/a	curriculum
How were they acquired?	parents	school funds teachers parents	parents	n/a	parents
Is there a responsible individual?	yes	no	yes	n/a	yes
What is the person's title?	library coordinator	n/a	principal	n/a	teachers
Do you use the public library?	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Is there a formal agreement?	yes	yes	n/a	no	no
What is the name of the library?	Hillsborough	Durham			
How close to school is it?	1.5 miles	3/4 mile	close		6 miles
Is the library used during school?	yes	yes	no	no	yes
How often?	monthly	biweekly	n/a	other	monthly
Has the library developed programs?	booktalks bibliographic inst. reader's advisory	no	no	no	no
Use of professional resources at DPI	occasionally	not at all	not at all	occasionally	occasionally
Use of PreK-12 resources at DPI	frequently	occasionally	occasionally	not at all	occasionally
Use of resources at UNC & State	occasionally	not at all	not at all	not at all	occasionally
Use of resources at State Library	not at all	not at all	not at all	not at all	occasionally
Difficulties in using resources?	No ISP (Internet Service Provider)	Lack of time Unaware of availability	Unaware of availability	no checkout Already have professional journals	hard to get to

	School 6	School 7
Number of students enrolled	102	1
Is there an IS curriculum?	yes	yes
Integrated or separate?	yes	integrated
Are books available?	yes	yes
What is the books' purpose?	curriculum	curriculum
How were they acquired?	school funds other funds teachers parents	parents
Is there a responsible individual?	no	yes
What is the person's title?	n/a	parent
Do you use the public library?	yes	yes
Is there a formal agreement?	no	no
What is the name of the library?		
How close to school is it?	3 miles & 1 mile	4 miles
Is the library used during school?	yes	no--except for special visits
How often?	biweekly	twice a year
Has the library developed programs?	no	booktalks bibliographic instruction
Use of professional resources at DPI	not at all	occasionally
Use of PreK-12 resources at DPI	not at all	occasionally
Use of resources at UNC & State	occasionally	not at all
Use of resources at State Library	occasionally	occasionally
Difficulties in using resources?	no	no

	Library 1	Library 2
Did a charter school contact you?	yes	yes
Did you contact a charter school?	no	no
Did a charter school ask you to develop programming?	yes	yes
Did you offer to develop programming?	no	no
Number of volumes, juvenile fiction	21,000-22,000	15,000
Number of volumes, juvenile non-fiction	10,000-11,000	15,000
Will the school affect your collection development?	no	no
Has your circulation increased?	yes	yes
Have you noticed more kids in the library?	yes	yes
Does anyone on staff have an education background?	yes	yes